**mennonite-theology-101-believers-baptism\_recording-1\_2021-02-08--t05-03-06pm--melanie Sequence**

**Maria:** [00:00:00] What makes a Mennonite, a Mennonite. And how did we come to believe what we believe? Welcome to Mennonite Girls in a Modern World! I'm your host, Maria Dyck, and today, Melanie Salte and I are continuing our series on Mennonite theology. In previous episodes, we have discussed pacifism and separation of church and state.

[00:00:20] And today we are addressing one of the most defining beliefs of historic and current Mennonites, and that is the belief of *'believers baptism'*. So Melanie, I know you've been doing a lot of research on this, so before we jump into what Mennonites believe about baptism, it would help for us to understand what was, what was the common belief at the time when we're talking like 500 years ago?

[00:00:43]**Melanie:** [00:00:43] So the common belief, at that time, the primary view, the main view that was held was the Catholic view. And the Catholic church was the main church at the time, and in the Roman Catholic tradition, you would baptize an infant and ... and it wasn't just a symbol.

[00:01:00] They actually believed that you would baptize that infant to cleanse that child from its sin. So they believed in the doctrine of original sin, which we're not going to get into today, but basically you needed to cleanse a child from its sin so that it could be saved if it were to die a young death, and so that you would secure that child's salvation.

[00:01:21] And then also it would secure that child's membership in the church. Another interesting piece of it is because, I mean, this ties in a little bit to what we're talking about in separation of church and state, but because the Catholic church was kind of the, the religious authority, but also the authority in the civil arena so like kind of your everyday life. Your certificate of baptism was also kind of like your birth certificate in legal situations, or just in the way the world worked, because the church and the law were so so tied together. So you needed to be baptized as an infant to be a recognized citizen of the state.

[00:02:04] So it was... it was to be part of the church, but it was also to be a part of the country essentially , and to be a recognized person in that country. So lots tied up in baptism, and then Martin Luther comes along and has some different ideas, and he changes everything. And Menno Simons comes along with him there. And so I don't, if you want to talk about Martin Luther a little bit and how he intersected with that Catholic church at the time.

[00:02:32]**Maria:** [00:02:32] So Martin Luther made a big break from the Catholic church on many, many issues. But what was interesting, is that at the end, when the dust settled, he actually retained infant baptism. He did not break away from that,

[00:02:44] Martin Luther kept infant baptism, but he had a different thinking on it than the Catholics. So for instance, he did not believe that baptizing an infant meant that they were saved. And there is a article that I will link at the end: it's from The Gospel Coalition, and it's by Kevin D. Young. And he talks about a "Brief Defense of Infant Baptism" and the reasons why many Lutherans continue to believe in infant baptism. And the number one reason is that they believe it is a sign of a covenant. And if you go back to the old Testament, when God came to Abraham, He made a covenant with him in the sign of the covenant at that time was circumcision, but it wasn't just Abraham's son, Isaac, that was circumcised. Ishmael was also circumcised, so that leads to the belief that circumcision can happen to those who are saved or outside of the covenant.

[00:03:40] Because circumcision was a covenant with Abraham, that got carried on into the church in the New Testament. And about that point, it was replaced with baptism and this idea that when we are baptizing an infant, we are saying that this child, you know, they may make a choice differently when they get older, but right now they are a part of the family, and they are gathered together in the covenant, and it does not represent regeneration or cleansing of sin.

[00:04:14] And some of the evidence for this in Scripture are the idea that there are times we hear about entire households being baptized. And we are not told specifically yes or no if that included children, but when they use the word *entire*, we have to assume it's the entire home.

[00:04:29] And if there was children in that home, it doesn't tell us if they were, or they weren't, but we'd almost have to assume that they were. And also, when we read Ephesians 6:1, it says that children are to obey their parents in the Lord. And, the argument is made that that shows that children aren't little pagans in the church, they are members of the same covenant underneath their parents.

[00:04:51] And so that's one of the reasons. But also one of the reasons that a lot of Lutherans, who follow the teaching of Martin Luther, carry it on: is infant baptism sprang up within two centuries of the apostles, and it carried on all the way up to the 16th century with no record of any kind of controversy until Martin Luther and the Anabaptist came along.

[00:05:15]And so, they said, surely if there had been controversy, it would have been recorded. But really, it depends, I think, how you look at it as a covenant and you're placing the children under a covenant. And then of course, Menno Simons comes along, and gives it, and the Anabaptist for that matter to come along, and give it an entirely different definition.

[00:05:34]**Melanie:** [00:05:34] Yeah, and it's interesting. I was listening to something the other day about the early church practices, and, in the early church, it was very common that families, like a mom and a dad and their kids, would all get baptized together because they were choosing to join the family of God together. And they were saying like, we're going to raise our kids in this and we're going to... we're totally committed to this.

[00:05:56] And so I think it is a matter of how you view baptism, and I don't know if I'm allowed to say this on a Mennonite show, but even like, my husband grew up in the Lutheran church and is a Lutheran who was baptized as an infant. And for their family, it was very much a part of becoming a part of the covenant and the family of God, and kind of this declaration that we're going to raise our kids in this community of believers, and then you have an opportunity when you're a teenager or an adult to choose to make that decision for yourself, if you're going to continue in that way. But it's, it is this declaration of: it matters that our kids are part of a community that believes in God and follows after Jesus.

[00:06:39] So, yeah, just interesting.

[00:06:42]**Maria:** [00:06:42] I can say that prior to this, I'd never really actually researched why anyone would believe in infant baptism, because I was just raised as a Mennonite, and that you only get baptized when you're older. So it was really good for me to research this and realize you can have an entirely different branch of brothers and sisters in Christ who do look at it differently.

[00:07:02] And I don't believe that that affects our salvation at the end at all. And so this is one of those areas where we can choose to show grace to each othe even though we have a different view.

[00:07:14]**Melanie:** [00:07:14] A different understanding. And I think both views, like the Lutherans that I have met and that I know, and that I'm married to, like both views are from Scripture- they take those views from Scripture. And I think that's, what's interesting here is that, my husband would say that the way that he grew up in the kind of the belief of infant baptism was very much supported by Scripture, cause you're looking at it in that covenant sense. Right?

[00:07:38] And so I think that's something to remember too is that we can have grace for one another and kind of understand that, "Oh, you see it through kind of a different lens, but it is still supported in Scripture." Like we see examples of it in Scripture, so...

[00:07:53]**Maria:** [00:07:53] Well, and I'm encouraged when I see men like Martin Luther and Menno Simons who are very intelligent men, and they didn't agree. So I'm not sure that we are going to agree today either. So that's okay. It's okay if we don't, but it is...

[00:08:05] **Melanie:** [00:08:05] It is okay.

[00:08:06]**Maria:** [00:08:06] Yeah.

[00:08:07] **Melanie:** [00:08:07] Well, and I think it's good to understand where *our* understanding comes from cause I was like you. I, before I met Brennan before we really, I don't know if I'd ever thought about infant baptism, honestly because you are so used to the tradition in which you grew up in. Right?

[00:08:21]And I appreciate the opportunity to even look at the history of where it came from cause I think the more we talk about it, just even understanding how in our own tradition now, how it's even been skewed, maybe from some of the, the original ideas of, of what believers baptism meant.

[00:08:39]So.... Menno Simons comes on the scene. It's interesting; he and Martin Luther at the kind of, at the very beginning of the Reformation were more on the same page when, when they thought about baptism. And then, like you said, once everything kind of settled in, Martin Luther held to the infant baptism but changed kind of what it meant.

[00:09:00]And Menno Simons went the direction of believing that baptism was, well, he says, in one of his writings, he says, *"Faith does not follow baptism, but baptism follows faith."* So baptism was this outward sign of an inward faith and inward choice to trust in the death and resurrection of Jesus, and kind of this inward choice to follow after Jesus. The Anabaptists were so focused on what it meant to follow after Jesus and to read Scripture so diligently, and then actually do what it says.

[00:09:43] Menno Simon's looked at that Matthew 28 passage that I think is quite familiar when we talk about baptism that says, "Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit and teaching them to obey everything I've commanded you," which is what Jesus says just before he leaves the disciples at the very end of Matthew.

[00:10:03] And so Menno Simons looked at that and said, "No, like it's obvious that *first* you make disciples. *First*, you have faith, and then the next step is to baptize." And you can't do that with a baby because of baby can't understand a decision of faith. They're, they're not equipped to make a decision of faith.

[00:10:25] And so baptism for the Anabaptist was not something you could be born into it-wasn't about declaring maybe an identity from a young age. It was about a witness to your faith in Jesus, and it was very individual like *this is my witness to my faith in Jesus.*

[00:10:43] And it did allow you entry into kind of, they called it a *brotherhood,* or like the family of God, or the membership of the church, and they took that really seriously. There was an accountability, like if you got baptized and joined a congregation, there was a high accountability to live out the teachings of Jesus.

[00:11:04] And that they were willing to follow Jesus like he says, you follow in baptism, you follow him into his death, and then also into new life. And at that time getting baptized meant you might actually die for that belief, so that following Jesus into his suffering was a real possibility.

[00:11:28]**Maria:** [00:11:28] And of course, that makes a lot of sense when you look... and as most of you know, my parents grew up old colony so I'm speaking from that perspective... but once you were baptized into the church, then you were able to be excommunicated if you sinned and were unrepentant.

[00:11:43]But I, I know some family members at times who were able to leave the colony and still come back to visit, and I would ask my mom, "How come they can leave and come back, and they're not shunned?" And she said, "Well, because they never got baptized to begin with." So it was considered...

[00:11:58] and is considered. if you got baptized, you knew better, you will be held accountable to that, and you will be shunned if you depart from that. But if you were never baptized, you never made that commitment, then you aren't shunned. And so it's a huge dividing line in some of those old colony churches, and I don't know how many other Mennonite churches, but...

[00:12:18] **Melanie:** [00:12:19] Yeah. Cause it was about your faith in Jesus first, but then it also, and if you think about it at this time, the Anabaptists were being so persecuted, and so to make that decision, and then to have a community that surrounded you, that stood with you in that decision as a big deal, but it also required a lot of accountability to say, "No, like we're going to stick with this. Even if we are burned at the stake, even if we are drowned for choosing to be baptized as an adult or as a believer " . And so there was this high cost of discipleship, and whether you were willing to follow Christ even into that.

[00:12:56] And so with all of that, and such a high kind of like heavy view of the responsibility of baptism, they thought there's no way we can baptize infants because how could we ask that of an infant before they can decide of their own will to make such a costly decision. Right? And, and their view of baptism, like we said, like Luther's view of baptism was very different than it was you're entering into a covenant with kind of the family of God.

[00:13:26] And the Anabaptist view was "No, this was a sign of your re generation in Christ, that you were becoming a new creation, that you were going to walk in the ways of Christ, and there was just a lot of layers of responsibility and kind of the discipleship that was required that followed that.

[00:13:45] And so they said like, you have to... you have to be of an age where you *know* the decision you were making, and you're willing to make that decision. It is a decision made out of true sincere faith in Jesus, and that, this is a witness to that.

[00:14:01]**Maria:** [00:14:01] And that was very much the belief I grew up with, and that I was taught. So I guess the question even for our listeners is-I'd be curious to know what was the average age of their baptism? I was fairly old...I think I was 20, 20 or 21. How about you, Melanie?

[00:14:15] **Melanie:** [00:14:15] Okay. I was young for our church. I didn't grow up in a Mennonite church, but very similar belief in terms of baptism like it was a profession of your faith. But I was 13 when I was baptized, which was quite young for our church. My parents were quite diligent in, and there was baptism classes and things too, but I was very serious about my decision, and I felt very confident in my decision and that, and it was a declaration of my desire to follow Jesus, and, and my faith in Jesus. And of course you're 13. You don't know what that even all means, but I don't know if you ever really do.

[00:14:53] **Maria:** [00:14:53] No. It's the same reason you get married is you really don't know everything that lies ahead either. Right? We don't. We make the best choice at that time. So interesting that you mentioned baptism classes because I didn't attend a Mennonite church for most of my growing up years. And so when I got baptized, there was no classes for me to take, but in later years when I did attend a Mennonite church, there definitely was classes.

[00:15:18] And I'm not against classes per se. I think they have their place. I think that they can be very instructive, particularly if you don't have a lot of biblical background, but I think one of the things that Mennonites tend to do-and Mennonites are so good at this -we are so organized, you know, so we tend to take things that could be a little bit more organic, and we just make some good hard lines, and just everything is very neat and orderly.

[00:15:47] We're so good at this, that sometimes we lose the heart of something because we're so buried in the details. And so, I don't have anything against baptism classes, but one of the things we were talking about, and that completely surprised me when I did actually attend a Mennonite church was how in order to get married, you had to be a member of the church, and to be a member of the church, you had to be baptized, and to be baptized, you had to take classes.

[00:16:15] So basically to get married, you had to take baptism classes. That was the long and the short of it. And, you know, I struggle with that because I think we're losing the definition of baptism when we tie it to marriage and church membership. What do you think?

[00:16:31]**Melanie:** [00:16:31] No, I totally agree. It's... it's funny. Like the, I mean, I didn't grow up in a Mennonite church, so I didn't grow up with that, but I know going back up to La Crete, and going to church and, and even attending some of my cousin's baptisms, it's like, you could always tell who, who was going to, you know, like what weddings you could prep for that, that year by who was in the baptism class.

[00:16:49] Right? It's like, Oh, they're going to get engaged soon or, Oh, they're already engaged. And I agree. Like I think if you go back to what I was reading some of Menno Simon's like his original writings, and the passion with which he writes about baptism and just what it means for that community and the call to discipleship.

[00:17:12] I think we do lose something if it becomes well, it's like, it's just a box I have to check to be a church member so that I can get married when really it was intended to be- if you have made a decision to follow Jesus, if you have made a decision to trust in the death and resurrection of Jesus to save you, then the next natural step is to declare that to your community.

[00:17:38]And to profess that faith to your community and, and it's an outward sign of something that's happened inwardly. And I think if we just focus on the outward sign and lose the what's happening inwardly part, then we lose that opportunity to really wonder about our own faith in Jesus and, our relationship with Jesus and, what's being called of us. Because there is a great call to baptism, or to discipleship and part of that discipleship, especially in the Anabaptist tradition, Mennonite tradition is that you get baptized as a sign of, *Okay, I'm going to be a disciple of Jesus, and I'm willing to live my life differently based on Scripture* b*ecause of my faith in Jesus and this baptism marks that decision in my life.*

[00:18:33] And so I think if we make it about, yeah, just like let's do the class, let's be a church member so that we can get married. We've missed the point of like a very rich point of, of what baptism was.

[00:18:49] **Maria:** [00:18:50] True. And when you go back to our early history and how the first leaders of the Anabaptist movement, and particularly the Mennonites, were so severely persecuted for holding these beliefs, you don't wander into these beliefs lightly if you know your life is on the line. And, and so now I feel like sometimes we tend to trivialize or toy with them a bit without realizing the cost, what it came with.

[00:19:17] And so part of the reason we we've done this entire series is because I do feel like as Mennonites we've hung on- we've retained the cultural identity of being a Mennonite, you know, the food and the traditions we've held on to that. We have certain spiritual beliefs, but we don't know why. And we've lost connection with *why do we believe this*?

[00:19:39] And do we still believe it? And is it worth still holding onto? And so, you know, just being able to review the last, you know, the three episodes that we've had on Mennonite history and theology have been so good for me to think about the cost that our, our ancestors paid to have these beliefs, and that there's something really rich and deep and meaningful about this movement that happened so so many years ago.

[00:20:07] And yet I feel like it's become watered down. And I think that really grieves me.

[00:20:11]**Melanie:** [00:20:11] No. I agree. Like I think doing this series has opened my eyes to, it's not just about maintaining a culture. It wasn't just about maintaining a culture for our ancestors, for these people that lived, you know, for just over 500 years ago, it, it was about, it was about just such serious dedication to their faith in Christ and what they were reading in Scripture.

[00:20:40] And they were so committed to living lives that matched what they read in Scripture and living lives that matched what they felt Christ was calling them to in Scripture. And I have been so challenged by going back to where all of this started from, and where our Mennonite roots come from.

[00:21:01] And I agree. I think sometimes we, we have lost it and it's become more of just part of culture. You know, like I like my *wareneki* with my *schmauntfat*, and I like to speak German with my family and, like, those are all good things. Like, I love the cultural piece of like our cultural, Mennonite kind of all the things that make us.

[00:21:19] Like our family values. I think we asked the question earlier on, in Instagram, like what makes a Mennonite a Mennonite? And weave all these things with these family values and hardworking and all those things are good things, but the heart of it, of like what made Mennonites Mennonite was like you said so significant and meaningful, and so tied up in a real active faith in Christ based on what they were reading in Scripture.

[00:21:48] And that has been very challenging to me, and has really made me think a lot about, am I willing to open Scripture and read it? Just really engage with it and then act and like live it out? Am I willing to count the cost to live out what I'm reading on these pages like my ancestors did? And I think that is, that is like a, that's a big call, you know?

[00:22:16] **Maria:** [00:22:16] Well, and one of the things that I've been thinking about is, you know, history doesn't really do you any good unless you're going to take from that and apply it to your future. So just to have gone back in time is not really going to do the work it needs to do unless we sit there and say, this is where we came from.

[00:22:33] But looking into this future, who are we going to be? Like, what kind of people are we going to continue to be? What will Mennonites be known for? We know what we've been known for in the past, but we have a whole different world and who do we want to be? What, what do we want our witness to be going forward?

[00:22:51] And so, you know, I'm hoping that this series gives us something to think about and challenges others, like it has challenged you and I, to really consider how knowing the past, and applying some of the, just like you said, taking time to allow Scripture to change us, and then what that looks like going forward.

[00:23:14]**Melanie:** [00:23:14] I've just been so encouraged and so challenged. And I think doing the series has given me, not more respect, but more understanding of where I've come from, you know, in a very big sense, like my ancestors, and it it's, affirmed that, yeah, I, I do agree with the things that they stood for, and those are valuable things to stand for, and the way that I live my life as a disciple of Jesus, but that those things matter, and the decisions that I make and how I act and live my life matter.

[00:23:55] I remember reading in one of the books - one of the history books I was reading to kind of study up for this. And at the time of, the Reformation, when all of this was happening, if there was a member in the community, in the town that didn't swear, that didn't abuse their wife and children, that treated their employees fairly and paid them fairly.

[00:24:20] They were automatically brought in, and thought to be an Anabaptist because of the way that they lived their life and were put on trial immediately.

[00:24:30] **Maria:** [00:24:30] Wow.

[00:24:30] **Melanie:** [00:24:30] Yeah. Which I was like, I know it's not, it's not about just your outward action. Like we said, it has to come from an inward place of your faith in Jesus.

[00:24:39] But that to me was, wow. Just immediately brought him for trial cause this guy is way too kind. He treats his employees fairly. He doesn't abuse the people in his family. He doesn't over-drink, and so let see if we need to burn them at the stake kind of thing. And so these people were that I know they were taking such, such chances just by living their lives in very ordinary ways, but in their ordinary ways, making decisions that would honor Christ and would love their families, that would love their communities, that treated people with the love of God. And they were committed to treating people with the love of God even if it meant they were gonna be brought in and burned at the stake for just treating their farmhands fairly, you know?

[00:25:31] And so that.... I just thought it does come down to these ordinary decisions that we make every day. How are we going to live as people who follow Jesus and want to show the love of Jesus in very simple ways in the way that we treat our family, in the way that true treat our neighbors, that *that* would be a light that shines .

[00:25:53] **Maria:** [00:25:53] I agree. Thank you for joining us today, and we hope that you've enjoyed this series, and we'd love to hear from you on maybe something that was new, that you didn't know, or something that's really challenged you, and that you're going to be taking with you in the future.